New York
Theatre Critics' Reviews
1945

Volume VI, Number 8. • Yearly Subscription $15.00 • Week of May 7, 1945

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NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

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Published by CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS : : : 235 EAST 22ND STREET, NEW YORK 10, N. Y

"Too Hot for Maneuvers"

Comedy by Les White and Bud Pearson; staging by Mr. White and Mr. Pearson; settings by Wolfgang Roth; presented by James S. Elliott at the Broadhurst Theatre, May 2, 1945.

THE CAST

Sgt. Walter Burrows	Dickie Van Patten
Sgt. Reggie Winthrop	Michael Dreyfuss
Capt. Hamilton	Ronald Telfer
Corp. "Einstein" Smetts	Alastair Kyle
Col. Steve Hadley	Richard Arlen
Amy Burrows	Helene Reynolds
Cadet "Wimpy" Worthington	Billy Nevard
Alex	Arthur Hunnicutt
Major Peters	Jed Prouty
Col. Bedloe	Lawrence Fletcher
Major Stanley	Harry Antrim
Mr. Winthrop	Fleming Ward
Mrs. Winthrop	Agnes Heron Miller
Mr. Perkle	Harry Koler
Patsy Laverne	Eve McVeagh
Countess Rosini	Ellen Andrews
Veronica	Sheila O'Malley
Hilda	Edith Leslie
Mrs. Olsen	Mrs. Ruth Nevard
Cadet No. 1	Roy Robson
Cadet No. 2	Marty Miller
Cadet No. 3	Pat O'Rourke
Cadet No. 4	Buddy Nevard

NEW YORK SUN
May 3, 1945

'Too Hot for Maneuvers,' at Broadhurst, an Incredibly Tiresome Farce

By WARD MOREHOUSE

THEY unveiled May's first play, "Too Hot for Maneuvers," at the Broadhurst last night and it's an incredibly bad one. Les White and Bud Pearson wrote it, James S. Elliott produced it, and Richard Arlen and twenty-two equally unfortunate co-players go through the motions of acting it.

The painfully unfunny comedy in "Too Hot for Maneuvers" is provided by the fact that Countess Rosini's reducing salon, down the road a piece from the Hadley Military Academy, is mistaken for a brothel. The nearness of the supposed disorderly house brings further trouble to an academy already in a state of deterioration and just about ready to close its doors. The authors finally find a way of saving good old Hadley, but they never had a chance of saving their play.

Something of the same situation used in "Too Hot for Maneuvers" was found recently in the ill-fated "It's a Gift" and also in the musical play, "Early to Bed." The new play at the Broadhurst is about the cadets and the faculty of a military academy, but its resemblance to "Brother Rat" ends right there.

Richard Arlen, starred in "Too Hot for Maneuvers" and making his first appearance in a Broadway production, is—well, fair. His role is that of the harassed headmaster. I'd like to see him in a play some time.

The others concerned include Jed Prouty, Lawrence Fletcher, Helene Reynolds, Dickie Van Patten, Michael Dreyfuss, Fleming Ward, Agnes Heron Miller, Alastair Kyle and Billy Nevard.

"Too Hot for Maneuvers," staged by the authors, is a ragged, rowdy and completely tiresome farce—a waste of time and considerable money. You wonder how it ever got into the Broadhurst and how and why it was ever produced at all.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
May 3, 1945

Richard Arlen Stars In Play at Broadhurst

By ROBERT GARLAND

EXCUSE it please, but "Too Hot for Maneuvers," which displayed itself last night at the Broadhurst, is too dull for Broadway, if I'm any judge of things theatrical. One Les White and another Bud Pearson whipped it up between them, using a dash of "It's a Gift," a pinch of "Brother Rat," a *soupçon* of "Ladies' Night" and no vast amount of either sublety or imagination. The result is not what you could call tasty.

"Too Hot for Maneuvers" unfurls the production banner of Jimmy Elliott, a theatre-minded youngster whose major claim to fame is that, at the age of 21, he has two other plays to his producing credit, both of which were failures. And, although it hurts me more than it could possibly hurt Mr. Elliott, I see no reason why the new arrival in 44th st. should interrupt his so far uninterrupted record.

Under the direction of the authors, against settings by Wolfgang Roth, in costumes by Lou Eisele, "Too Hot for Maneuvers" manages to pass an on-stage miracle. That is to say, it achieves dirtiness and dullness, both at the same time. What is more, the dirtiness of this Les White-Bud Pearson comedy is as uncalled for as it is tasteless, as forced as it is unfunny, as juvenile as it is unjustified.

Thanks, M. Balzac

Let's word it nicely. "Too Hot for Maneuvers" retells the not-too-droll story in which one kind of a house is stupidly mistaken for another. The mere fact that the Countess Rosini's establishment happens to be located hard by the Hadley Military Academy fails to freshen the basic Balzacian situation. The basic Balzacian situation is trite and threadbare. At the Broadhurst, it's also unbelievable.

Hadley Military Academy, "about 50 miles from New York's Pennsylvania Station," is run by a group of Morons in Uniform—which, by the way, would make a fitting title for the play! So there's no cause to be surprised when, having learned that a couple of the boys are not unfamiliar with the interior of the Countess' massage emporium, they interpret the innocent visitation in the worst impossible way.

And there, in a nutshell, you have the not-too-droll story "Too Hot for Maneuvers" sets out to tell. For three acts and a couple of scenes, the mistaken identity of La Rosini's establishment is played up with a double-entendre that has a single meaning. Even a tiny tot whose mother is raising him to be a soldier becomes involved in the dubious proceedings . . . Frankly, it's just too tasteless!

Poor Richard 2d

A not undistinguished cast speaks all the authors' words and makes all the authors' motions. Richard Arlen, a newspaperman turned flier, a flier turned actor, pretends to be head man around Hadley Military Academy. But he doesn't believe it any more than you do. So, in Mr. Arlen's mouth and in Mr. Arlen's hands, the authors' words and the authors' motions amount to next to nothing. Les White and Bud Pearson ain't done right by their importation from Hollywood.

Even in a New Jersey soldier-factory there's a heroine in the offing. At Hadley Military Academy, she's Amy Burrows, sister, I gather, to the Sgt. Burrows of Dickie Van Patten, and secretary, as the saying is, to the Col. Hadley of Mr. Arlen. Amy is impersonated by Helene Reynolds, one more refugee from West Coast studios and a likely looking lady. Miss Reynolds is an actorial asset.

Arthur Hunnicutt is rightly rural as Alex, a man of all work by trade, a pessimist at heart. Agnes Heron Miller, the quick Gilbert Miller's sister and the dead Henry Miller's daughter, is a snooty Mrs. Winthrop to the snootier Mr. Winthrop of Fleming Ward. The youngsters perform their unsavory tasks with clean-eyed fortitude. . . . Like head colds and rainy days, "Too Hot for Maneuvers" is typical of Spring.

NEW YORK POST
May 3, 1945

'Too Hot for Maneuvers' Too Inept for Broadway

By WILELLA WALDORF

THE producer of "Too Hot for Maneuvers," which opened last night at the Broadhurst, is said to be twenty-one years of age—old enough to know better than to inflict such juvenile trash on Broadway. The age of the two authors has not been mentioned, but they are doubtless brash young blades of seventeen or so with a deathless passion for gags. All of them—producer and authors—should be soundly spanked and made to stand in the corner with dunce caps on.

"Too Hot for Maneuvers" concerns a military academy operated by a young colonel honorably discharged from the Air Force. It's been in his family for years, and the equipment, including most of the faculty, is falling to pieces from senile decay.

Down the road a piece, Countess Rosini, who used to do a pigeon danbe at the World's Fair, operates a massage parlor and reducing establishment. All of the men in the vicinity are under the impression it is something a good deal gayer than that, and the Countess lets them go on thinking so. When two of the older cadets are caught there after taps, the Colonel himself decides to investigate.

All this leads to a series of scenes, full of double-talk, in which everybody thinks everybody else is up to something very spicy. It is supposed to be especially uproarious when a small cadet about two feet tall is suspected of being an habitue of the Countess's establishment.

The play is poorly written, execrably directed and badly acted. A number of well-known players who have given a good account of themselves on previous occasions, have absolutely no chance here. Why Richard Arlen, the screen actor, chose to make his Broadway debut in such a work is something that only Mr. Arlen can explain. Hollywood must be very dull just now.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
May 3, 1945

Rather Cold

By HOWARD BARNES

THE new comedy at the Broadhurst makes a clumsy try at hooking into the war. It misses by more than an eyelet. "Too Hot for Maneuvers" sports a lot of uniforms as it rambles through some unfortunate japes about a military academy and an adjacent massage parlor. Even with the engaging Richard Arlen leading the military, in what amounts to an escape from the Hollywood salt mines, the piece has no more fragrance than a cigar butt in a smoking compartment. When it is not downright tasteless it is dreary.

* * *

At its best the show demonstrates anew that youngsters are as adept at make-believe as their elders. Little Billy Nevard walks off with the dubious acting honors of the production as he plays a pint-size commando leader in the academy. His fellow cadets suggest that there may have been a suggestion of a plot somewhere in the Les White-Bud Pearson script. As it stands on Forty-fourth Street, though, "Too Hot for Maneuvers" doesn't even give the kids a break. It is both muddled and meretricious.

* * *

White and Pearson obviously have been enchanted with their theme. The accidental visit of two academy boys to a legitimate weight-reducing establishment is played for every innuendo in the situation. It finally has the head of the academy and his faculty members making fools of themselves in the massage parlor and suspecting the worst of the commando squadron leader, for all his five or six years. They have staged their play in the mood of the writing. In other words, the action is an ersatz as the lines. There is very little indeed to commend the newest exhibit on Broadway.

* * *

It is a pity that Arlen had to announce his allegiance to the theater under such a false standard. He does no great job of acting, to be sure, as the head of the military academy, but he performs with an assurance which merited better material. Dickie Van Patten, Michael Dreyfuss and Alastair Kyle back him

up bravely as several of his charges and Helene Reynolds and Ellen Andrews pose prettily in the feminine roles. They are all involved in a lost cause, so far as artistry, significance or mere fun is concerned. "Too Hot for Maneuvers" is a theatrical mishap.

NEW YORK TIMES
May 3, 1945

Cold Turkey

By LEWIS NICHOLS

JAMES S. ELLIOTT is Broadway's youngest producer, and in "Too Hot for Maneuvers" he is offering Broadway's sorriest mess of juvenilia. The play, by Les White and Bud Pearson, is bad in most of the common and formal ways, with a good deal of tastelessness thrown in to make certain. The acting with one or two exceptions is pretty silly, and in directing the authors appear to have gone out of their way to point up the comedy's less plausible features. Mr. Elliott now is 21 years old, which is voting age and should be the age of discretion as well; with the current incident at the Broadhurst behind him, he can move in only one direction—that towards better things.

"Too Hot for Maneuvers" is about a military academy, and its quaint little situation involves a couple of the cadets charged with visiting Countess Rosini's "reducing salon" down the lane a bit. The Messrs. White and Pearson keep double entendres in the air like a juggler keeps ninepins, until long after an audience would be willing to see one of them come down on the authors' heads. The play has no single-minded humor and its figures, with the exception of an aged teacher, are wooden. Richard Arlen of the screen has chosen "Too Hot for Maneuvers" to lead himself to Broadway; that was his fault and is unfortunate, for in something else he might be all right. Jed Prouty plays the elderly teacher nicely; Dickie van Patten, Michael Dreyfuss and Alastair Kyle are three of the prominent cadets. For the records, the Countess turned out to be O.K. She did run a reducing salon. The whole evening was like that.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
May 3, 1945

'Too Hot for Maneuvers' Leaves One Witness Cold as an Ice Cube

By JOHN CHAPMAN

ONCE there was a very funny comedy about a military academy called "Brother Rat." At the Broadhurst Theatre last night appeared another, "Too Hot for Maneuvers," which is mousy.

In it Richard Arlen, of the movies, makes his Broadway debut. Mr. Arlen is one of the most amiable persons in all Hollywood, and a shrewd operator not only in the movies but also in such sidelines as running air-freight fleets and raising bass eggs for the California state fish hatchery; but he picked the wrong vehicle to carry him into the big-time legitimate theatre.

"Too Hot for Maneuvers," by Les White and Bud Pearson, is ill-contrived and anxious. It seems to be so busy looking for the next funny situation that it forgets to be amusing at all. And it makes a mistake in taste, for part of it is military-school kid stuff and the rest of it is clumsy sex innuendoes about a massage parlor run by one Countess Rosini. The two elements do not mix.

I shan't bother you with the plot because there must be quite a lot of exciting stuff to read in the paper this morning. It should be sufficient to state that, in addition to Mr. Arlen, a number of very pleasant actors take part, and any one of them could go to town in a good role in a good play.

Among these players are such youngsters as Michael Dreyfuss, Alastair Kyle and Billy Nevard and such grown-ups as Helene Reynolds, Ellen Andrews, Arthur Hunnicutt, Jed Prouty and Lawrence Fletcher. Fleming Ward appears as a wealthy snob and he wears a dark suit, a derby, a tan polo coat, and brown shoes. This may be explained by the fact that the authors, who also directed, are from Hollywood.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
May 3, 1945

'Too Hot for Maneuvers' Silly, Inept, Smutty

By BURTON RASCOE

JIMMY ELLIOTT is a big boy now. He's 21 years old. He ought to know better. You could excuse him on the grounds of youth and inexperience when he made his debut as a big-time Broadway producer two years ago last Monday with a silly mess called "The First Million," which expired after five performances. But the aesthetic misdemeanor he committeed last night by presenting "Too Hot for Maneuvers" is not so readily to be condoned.

"Too Hot for Maneuvers" is a smutty little do-dad that is much more offensive than "Good Night Ladies," inasmuch as the players in "Good Night Ladies" at least were limited to adults. There are eight kids, ranging in years from 7 to 17, not counting supers, mixed up in the snickering innuendos of "Too Hot for Maneuvers." And this new Jimmy Elliott production is even more amateurishly written and directed than that unlamented flop, "Good Night Ladies."

The less said about "Too Hot for Maneuvers" the better; but, just to give you an idea, two upper class cadets in a boys' military school wanted to reduce so they could make a basketball game, so they went to the massage parlor of "Countess Rosini." They were seen coming out of the place long after taps, reported and, in a court-martial, stripped of their chevrons because the headmaster and other officer members of the faculty are convinced that the massage parlor is something more than it pretends to be and by innuendo, the boys, under trial, seem to confess to "conduct unbecoming a gentleman."

From there on, this aesthetic misdemeanor grows progressively more reprehensible and inept, reaching the height of its breach of taste in a maudlin bit of sentimentality involving the dismissal of one of the aged founders of the school on grounds of senility. . . . The only players who showed any skill in surmounting the implausibilities of the dialog and the wretchedness of the direction were Lawrence Fletcher and four of the kids—Michael Dreyfuss, Dickie Van Patten, Alastair Kyle and Billy Nevard. Richard Arlen, who is starred, was woefully ill-advised to choose this vehicle for his Broadway debut; his chore at the Broadhurst won't enhance his reputation as an actor one whit. In fact, many will wonder if he has good sense.

The authors are listed as Les White and Bud Pearson.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
May 3, 1945

A Nice Clump of Poison Ivy

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

WHOEVER first wrote of "the merry month of May" was clearly no theatergoer. But even for May, dismal as it traditionally is on Broadway, *Too Hot for Maneuvers* seems a little too much. Farces this time of the year aren't expected to be funny. Farces laid in military academies, at this time or any other time of the year, can be presumed to be foolish. Farces that go in for tots as well as adolescents are almost fated to be trying. But *Too Hot for Maneuvers* can't just be paddled for its silliness and tedium; it needs to be horsewhipped for its cheapness and vulgarity. At Hadley Military Academy it's not too hot for maneuvers—there's just no time for them; everybody's too busy boning up on the double-entendre.

The proceedings get going when a couple of innocent cadets, anxious to lose weight so the can make the basketball team, try to enroll with a neighboring "masseuse." The school authorities, knowing what "masseuses" too often are, and assuming that the cadets knew also, punish the kids and decide to case the massage parlor. There's really no reason to share with you the further delights of the plot—the regulation misunderstandings, the creaking makeshifts, the dreary, shoddy innuendos. But, just to crush you completely, *Too Hot for Maneuvers* includes, at their very worst, the bespectacled cadet who talks like a book, the drawling handy man, the manly little eight-year-old, the pathetically ancient professor who has outlived his usefulness, the . . . but you can finish the list for yourself.

The whole thing is too cheesy for the acting to matter; but Richard Arlen and some of the others in the cast do all they can to earn their salaries.

"Common Ground"

Play by Edward Chodorov; staging by Mr. Chodorov; settings by George Jenkins; presented by Edward Choate at the Fulton Theatre, April 25, 1945.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
April 26, 1945

A Serious Play Goes Downhill

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

FOR his guts and plain speaking, Edward Chodorov is the kind of playwright that the theater badly needs. It has not many others who are not afraid of ugly words and ugly facts, who realize the world will not be saved just by vague faith and frantic flag-waving, whose heads as well as whose hearts, so to speak, are in the right place. Last year, in *Decision*, Mr. Chodorov wrote a crude but hard-hitting stage pamphlet that warned us against the dangers of native fascism. Now, in *Common Ground*, he has written another play with things in it that make you sit up and take notice. Once again, when blunt facts are to be faced or harsh language is to be used, Mr. Chodorov pulls no punches. The pity is that despite some telling scenes, interesting characters and strong talk, *Common Ground* fails as a play to have enough drive or impact.

Taking place near Naples just before its capture, *Common Ground* concerns a small USO troupe who have fallen into enemy hands.

THE CAST

Aide	Arthur Gondra
Buzz Bernard	Philip Loeb
Kate DeRosa	Nancy Noland
Geegee (Genevieve Gilman)	Mary Healy
Nick DeRosa	Joseph Vitale
Alan Spencer	Donald Murphy
1st Italian Soldier	J. Anthony LaPenna
2d Italian Soldier	Lou Gilbert
3d Italian Soldier	Rupert Pole
Ted Williamson	Paul McGrath
Captain Angelini	Luther Adler
Colonel Hofer	Peter von Zerneck

They consist of a well-known Jewish comedian, a famous young Hollywood actor, a pretty young thing on the make, and an Italian-American small-timer and his wife. Their first encounter is with a half-psychotic, violently anti-Semitic newspaperman who has long ago gone over to the Nazis. He thinks himself no traitor to a country that is so much of a melting pot, so full of "garbage can Americans" that it offers no "common ground." After the newspaperman, there comes a Nazi colonel who orders the Jew to a concentration camp and gives the others the choice between trouping in the Nazi cause (with violent disparagement of America) and being shot. Plot-wise, the rest of the play is devoted to which they will do; in the end all four decide to die. Theme-wise, their decision serves as an answer to the newspaperman's taunt: it is the idea of democracy and loathing of fascism for which they are willing to give their lives, that provides a common ground.

* * *

No one will deny the importance of this sentiment. Yet to give it fresh force, to make more of it than a generality, requires in the theater a dramatic power that Mr. Chodorov cannot achieve. As the play proceeds, he is forced to fall back on a great deal too much and too repetitious and too preachy talk; and he slowly, also, shifts the tone of the play from the sharply realistic to the vaguely "heroic." The shift is very unfortunate, because the emotional leverage is lacking to make the heroic mood effective. Mr. Chodorov is at much his best during the first act, where there is a hard, even brutal, give-and-take of words and ideas. There, too, he seems prepared for discussion of a great many specifically troubling things. The first act crackles. But in it Mr. Chodorov, dramatically, shoots his wad.

There are, however, some interesting characters in *Common Ground;* it is too bad they exist only in themselves. The Jewish actor is drawn with a good deal of understanding, and very well played by Philip Loeb. The Italian-American and his wife are rather nicely portrayed; Joseph Vitale and Nancy Noland handle the roles well, and she has a capital moment when she sings a honky-tonk song. On the other hand, Mr. Chodorov has introduced a fancy brand of comic Italian captain who does not speak a word of English throughout the play, and adds nothing to it except a chance for Luther Adler to indulge in bravura. Paul McGrath gives a good performance in the not too well-drawn role of the newspaperman, and Donald Murphy does well enough in the part of the Hollywood star.

* * *

I don't mean to weigh the scales too heavily against *Common Ground.* It has a good deal to say, says some of it sharply, is frequently challenging; the serious theater-goer will find it, for all its shortcomings, much more rewarding than the usual slick hokum of fluff. But it is too undramatic, too long-winded, too lacking in final impact to hold up as a play or to win out at the box office.

There is, incidentally, a very good set by George Jenkins.

NEW YORK SUN
April 26, 1945

'Common Ground,' Well Played, Gets Out of Control After Its Opening Act

By WARD MOREHOUSE

EDWARD CHODOROV has given some sharp and observant writing to three plays of Broadway's immediate past and now he comes along with an anti-Fascist drama, "Common Ground," which is steadily exciting during its opening act and then gets out of control. The new piece was submitted last night at the Fulton by Edward Choate.

"Common Ground" is a play of thought, theory and comment. It has some strong scenes and is well played throughout, but after its engrossing first act it grows talky and very repetitious and as Mr. Chodorov pounds and expounds his play loses its vibrancy. And it is curiously unsatisfying at the finish.

The author of "Kind Lady" and "Decision" is now writing of the plight of five members of a U. S. O. unit captured in Italy by the Nazis just before the fall of Naples. They're held by their captors in the music room of a war-shattered castle and are given the choice of continuing as touring entertainers, serving up Nazi propaganda, or being shot.

One of the lot is a Jew, a famous comedian. Another is a Hollywood star of German descent. A third is of Italian parentage, a fourth of Irish ancestry, and the fifth, the beautiful girl singer, just calls herself an American. She's from St. Louis.

Mr. Chodorov, over the course of two acts, reveals the varying reactions of each member of the group and they are finally presented as Americans all, and on common ground, as they make their decision. The Jew is marched off to a concentration camp.

"Common Ground" is only intermittently interesting after its compact first act, lapsing frequently into declamatory drama. But the players come through splendidly. Philip Loeb is an actor of unction and variety and as Buzz Bernard, leader of the unit, he gives a performance of humor and deep feeling. Paul Mc Grath is enormously effective, particularly in his first scene, as a traitorous, Jew-hating newspaper man, who has become a Nazi radio commentator. Luther Adler is fascinatingly repulsive as a fop of an Italian captain, and he speaks entirely in Italian, a language more familiar to another member of this department than to me. Joe Vitale contributes vigor and violence to the role of a vaudeville trouper who is pro-American to the end. Mary Healy brings good looks to the part of the troubled girl from St. Louis. Donald Murphy is the Hollywood actor. Peter von Zerneck is the offensive Nazi colonel.

Edward Choate, a man to be encouraged in the theater, has given Mr. Chodorov's play an excellent production. The setting was designed and lighted by the oncoming George Jenkins.

"Common Ground" is a heated plea for the principles of democracy and in some scenes it comes forth as a stirring denunciation of Fascism, but as it goes along it becomes more preachment than play and it fails to sustain its early promise and excitement.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
April 26, 1945

'Common Ground' Opens at the Fulton

SALLY: What other kind of plays don't you like?
BILL: Plays where a lot of people all get caught together in catastrophe and all face death in a lump.
"The Voice of the Turtle"
By John van Druten.

By ROBERT GARLAND

IN the long run, which it's not so sure to have, there's less originality in "Common Ground" than meets the ear and eye. Edward Chodorov's new play starts out big and bravely on what looks like a fresh and timely tack. But by the time the first of three acts is finished, it's nothing of the sort.

Instead, it's merely another rehashing of one of the kinds of plays Sgt. Bill Page doesn't like. This time, the death-facers are working members of USO-Camp Shows, Inc.

Somewhere in embattled Italy, not far south of Naples, five flying USO-ers are brought to earth and captured, costumes, make-up and all, by the invading Nazis. Insofar as their entertainment value is concerned, these three men and two women are not what even the most un-theatre-minded man-in-the-foxhole would call brilliant.

As a matter of honesty, if the act they put on for a champagne-drinking Heinie and his champagne-passing yes-man is a fair example of what they have to offer, God help GI Joe!

Trapped in the music-room of a bombed-out Sorrentoian palazzo overlooking the Bay of Naples, Buzz Bernard, Kate DeRosa, Nick DeRosa, Geegee Gilman and Alan Spencer, American vaudevillians all, face almost certain death, each according to the best or worst that's in him. All but Buzz. Worse than death waits impatiently for him.

Death in a Lump

If the new arrival at the Fulton lived up to its opening stanza, "Common Ground" would be the first great play of World War II. That opening stanza is everything such an opening stanza should be. It's promising. It's provocative. It's written with a staccato terseness that promises better things to come.

These better things fail to materialize. And "Common Ground" wanders off into one of those plays where a lot of people all get caught together in a catastrophe and all face death in a lump.

Facing death in a lump, Buzz and Kate and Nick and Geegee and Alan proceed to talk around in circles, infrequently interrupted by Ted Williamson, a renegade ex-member of the Newspaper Guild, Col. Hofer, a Hitlerian sheep in wolf's clothing, or Capt. Angelini, who speaks Italian with his mouth and quite another language with his hands. It's not as interesting as it should be.

This one wants to hold out. But not ardently. That one wants to give in. But not ardently. So they talk and argue and fight it out among them. But not ardently, either.

In the end, Edward Chodorov isn't afraid of tragedy. Looking at the benefits of a happy ending with one eye and at the benefits of a happy boxoffice with the other, our playwright marches Buzz off to a nearby Belsen, and Kate, Dick, Geegee and Alan off to an adjacent garden reserved for executions. The Marines do not arrive and the American situation is not well in hand.

Notice La Noland

All this, and not much more, is acted with skill, sympathy and comprehension. Under the direction of the author, in a superb, if somewhat overpowering, setting designed and lighted by George Jenkins, a dozen well provided players go through their well provided paces. If "Common Ground" isn't the first great play of World War II, the fault most certainly isn't theirs.

If I had a medal to present for acting, I'd bestow it on Paul McGrath for his impersonation of Ted Williamson, a to-be-shot-at-sunrise American newspaperman definitely on the Nazi side.

In the opening act of "Common Ground," Philip Loeb has many a merry wisecrack dealing with Hollywood and those who work and think-they-work therein.

These he delivers with wry and winning understatement. Later on, his Buzz Bernard grows silent, sullen and suspicious. You can't exactly blame him. And Mr. Loeb becomes silent, sullen and suspicious at the same time.

Among the ladies Nancy Noland has deserted the Elysee Monkey Bar, where she sang satiric ditties, for the showshop known as legitimate. Her Kate DeRosa is something for the record. Watch it.

For a moment in the final stanza, Philip Loeb, in his role of Buzz Bernard, turns drama critic, commenting astutely on the open-faced acting of Luther Adler as Capt. Angelini. Or, if I'm not confusing you, on the acting of Capt. Angelini as Luther Adler.

There's no great fault to be found with the others . . . Being more of a promise than a play, "Common Ground" leaves me with a feeling of frustration.

NEW YORK POST
April 26, 1945

Chodorov's 'Common Ground' Has Some Good Stuff In It

By WILELLA WALDORF

LAST season Edward Chodorov wrote, and directed, "Decision," a play about fascism on the home front that got in some hard punches in the right direction, but was marred by inept play-writing and a so-so production.

Last night his latest, "Common Ground," arrived at the Fulton Theatre. It is a considerable improvement on "Decision" in every respect. Mr. Chodorov is still far from being the world's most brilliant dramatist, and, like most propagandists, he is inclined to orate a bit too much at times, but he is a young man with ideas and convictions and a certain flair for drama—melodrama, if you will—that kept us interested to the end last night despite the fact that "Common Ground" is over-long, somewhat repetitious and in need of a more astringent touch at times.

USO Troupe in Italy

"Common Ground" is not only melodrama, it is ham melodrama. The stage is full of hams, since the play concerns a USO troupe of entertainers from the U. S. A. captured in Italy by the Nazis just before the fall of Naples. There are five in the company: Buzz Bernard, a Jewish comedian of long experience and Hollywood fame; Geegee Gilman, a pretty but vapid movie "starlet"; Alan Spencer, a screen hero of German descent invalided out of the Marines after two years in the Pacific, and Mr. and Mrs. DeRosa, a small-time vaudeville team. He's Italian; she's Irish.

The DeRosas are there because they need the money. It's a job to them. The others are celebrities donating their services to "the boys." They're dumped together in the music room of a partially shattered Italian castle outside Naples, and their first visitor is an American newspaperman all ready to give them the glad hand. He's an America-hater with an inferiority complex and a chip on his shoulder who's been broadcasting from Berlin telling his fellow citizens in the United States how wonderful Hitler is.

During their incarceration, they are also treated to a harangue by the local commandant, Capt. Angelini, who speaks only Italian and acts like something out of comic opera. But it is the German Col. Hofer who orders a command performance of their soldier show, pays attention at least to the girlie part of it while sipping his champagne, and informs them at the finish that they will be sent on a tour of Italy, Germany and the occupied countries to tell the people how America hates the war, doesn't want to fight, etc., etc. As the renegade newspaperman puts it, Americans have no common ground.

The only person they don't want is the Jewish comedian. He is bound for a concentration camp without delay. As for the others, if they don't agree to perform, they'll be shot in the garden in an hour. The author might have called this play "Decision," too.

Mr. Chodorov has introduced these people in a stirring first act, and it is inevitable that the necessity to sustain the suspense for two more acts is bound to let things down a bit as time goes on.

Philip Loeb as Buzz pulls things together in excellent fashion, both as actor and comedian, and the other troupers are played convincingly by Joe Vitale, Donald Murphy, Mary Healy and Nancy Noland. Luther Adler has a wonderful time as the Italian officer, and we are informed by one who lived many years in Italy that his Italian is as good as his characterization is authentic. Paul McGrath's traitorous newspaperman is thoroughly nauseating as ordered, and Peter Von Zerneck's portrayal of the Nazi colonel is cool and bloodless. George Jenkins' ruined castle setting is uncommonly effective.

It is to be hoped Mr. Chodorov will do some cutting of his last act and we could wish he wouldn't insist upon having his movie hero quote so much poetry. There are times when "Common Ground" features not only ham acting but ham play-writing as well.

But we recommend it to you. There's plenty there to think about and good entertainment to boot. See it.

NEW YORK TIMES
April 26, 1945

USO in Italy

By LEWIS NICHOLS

As the author of "Common Ground," Edward Chodorov has a couple of things worthy of considerable respect. He doesn't like fascism, and he considers the theatre as one of the places in which he should say so. If his play had beginning and end in those basic premises, all would be well at the Fulton. Unfortunately, however, Mr. Chodorov's good intentions run away with his craftsmanship. On a subject of great importance he has written a mediocre play. His study of a group of Americans, faced first with fascism in Italy and then with themselves, jumps from shrillness to extended wordiness, and midway through it changes its theme. Starting as an attack on the enemy, it ends by an account of how a group of Americans discovered they were Americans. Mr Chodorov is left with a jumbled evening

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The people of "Common Ground" are a group of USO Camp Shows entertainers. Their plane had come down in Italy before the capture of Naples, and they were taken prisoner. In the group is a Jewish comedian, a screen actor with a German background, a vaudevillian with Italian background, a young actress from the movies, and the wife and partner of the vaudevillian. The German colonel offers them the choice of entertaining German and Italian troops or being shot. The comedian gets no choice; he is destined for the concentration camp. The substance of the play is how the various members of the troupe make up their minds not to perform for the enemy. The choices are individual, but all decide ultimately they cannot compromise.

Of the play's three acts, the first is the best. The characters are easily drawn and they are likable people. Then, in the second act, Mr. Chodorov grows shrill. The enemy—as represented by an Italian captain and a German colonel—come out with a good deal of caricature. Sometimes in life it is hard to tell whether those people are caricature or not, but the author and an actor or so gild the black lily. In the third act, the author settles to a discussion of what makes a good American, and the feeling is that he is speaking for his people and they are not speaking from their own characters. The ending of the play —when the members of the troupe walk off singing to their rendezvous with the firing squad—is theatrical and quite bad.

* * *

As the comedian, Philip Loeb turns in a fine card. He is very funny during the play's earliest and best parts, and later on gives a sincere performance as a man who quietly accepts the inevitability of a concentration camp. Joseph Vitale is the vaudeville actor, who quite frankly had joined the troupe because he needed the money and would be appearing with stars, and Nancy Noland plays his wife. Donald Murphy is the young screen actor and Mary Healy the actress. Luther Adler dances all over the stage as an Italian officer, at one point making a long speech in that language, and Peter von Zerneck is the German. A former newspaperman turned fascist is shown for the heel he is by Paul McGrath, who makes Ted Williamson as unpleasant an individual as can be found in the high Forties.

But with "Common Ground," Mr. Chodorov aimed farther than his arrow could carry.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
April 26, 1945

Full of Pitfalls

By OTIS L. GUERNSEY JR.

A TIMELY theme has been staged for the public view in "Common Ground," the new Edward Chodorov play at the Fulton. Through five U. S. O. performers held prisoner behind the German lines near Naples it examines the strength and weaknesses within the structure of America's mixture of populations. No one could quarrel with "Common Ground" as a democratic thesis, but as a play it becomes disjointed with speechifying after a strong beginning. It is a pity that the good intent of this drama could not have been given three full acts of effective theater.

* * *

The five troupers of "Common Ground" make up a potpourri of hyphenated Americans; there is a Jewish comedian, an Italian guitarist married to an Irish Catholic singer, a young film actor of German extraction and a starlet of no definable affiliation. When they are commanded to play and speak propaganda for the German troops or be shot in the garden outside, the playwright has each of them examine his or her own conscience for the prejudices that will influence each individual decision to yield or die. It is here that the speeches begin and the development of th ingenious situation ends. Interesting and right thinking though the words may be, they make for static posing. A good conclusion — that all of them are equally Americans—is reached, but not by way of lively theater.

The fact that Mr. Chodorov has directed his own play seems to be responsible for many of its weaknesses. When an American journalist turned traitor comes on-stage and tells the performers what suckers he thinks they are, "Common Ground" is an electric drama. But when smart manipulation is required to disguise the thesis with dramatic action, the direction too frequently points up the author's emphasis into forceless purple passages, sometimes with the device of off-stage gunfire ineffectively used. It is never easy for an author to direct his own play; it is certainly less so when a fresh viewpoint might have veiled some of its flaws.

* * *

The author has traced excellent characterizations, interpreted by a group of knowing actors. Philip Loeb is both wise and amusing as the comedian who laughs at the Nazis whom he knows are going to kill him. Paul McGrath is superbly hateful as the traitorous journalist, and Luther Adler does an effective bit of pantomime as an Italian captain. Joseph Vitale gives a good impression of the likeable but dumb guitarist, and Donald Murphy handles the changing moods of his serious-minded Hollywood Adonis with a sure touch. On the distaff side, the glamorous type and the slightly used product are characterized by Mary Healy and Nancy Noland. There are many moments in "Common Ground" when these characters have the breath of life and drama in them on the Fulton's stage. Only the addition of well-knit action to counterbalance the urgent message was needed to make this Chodorov play more than merely an occasionally eloquent theatrical obbligato to the current doings in San Francisco.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
April 26, 1945

Five USO Entertainers Die Like Americans in 'Common Ground'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

THERE is good theatre in Edward Chodorov's "Common Ground"—good writing, good acting, good ideas, good direction; but to me there is a bit too much theatre and not quite enough drama to make the play what it has promised to be in its first few minutes.

In its first few minutes it lands five USO entertainers in a bomb-wrecked, German-held Italian castle. Anticipation of what may develop is keen, for the setting (by this season's wonder boy, George Jenkins) is splendid, the players are assured and their characters are quickly established. Just what would happen, anyhow, to a group of civilians whose plane has been shot down behind enemy lines?

Well, what happens is they are given the choice of being shot in the popy-strewn garden of the castle or entertaining and propagandizing for the enemy. Four of the five, that is; the fifth is a Jew and he is automatically booked for a torture camp.

Five Kinds of Americans

Of the four, one is an actor of German descent, one is an Italian-American, one is an Irish-American and one seems to be plain American. After the first shock of the ultimatum one or the other wavers and thinks entertaining for the Nazis is better than dying foolishly. But, after two acts of talking themselves out about themselves, they decide to die like heroes. Their disunity because of their varied backgrounds vanishes and they are all just Americans.

A good deal of this is told pithily and with punch—but I think the disadvantage of Mr. Chodorov's play is that its truths are self-evident. One of the earliest groups of Americans found and proclaimed certain truths to be self-evident, and a dramatic thesis on the subject of Americanism, if it is mere reiteration, must rely for strength upon the drama in it, rather than the thesis.

The final two acts of "Common Ground" are insufficient in progressive movement to be suspenseful, although they have, as I've reported, some direct talk and some admirable performances. Twice, for instance, Luther Adler has long scenes as a fascist captain and he does them all in very good Italian; yet despite the